

Presentation Abstract: TWO DECADES OF CHANGE IN A COASTAL SCRUB COMMUNITY: SONGBIRD RESPONSES TO PLANT SUCCESSION AND THE ROLE OF DISTURBANCE.

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Bird responses to plant succession in n. California coastal scrub have been monitored intensively for 22 yr at the Palomarin Field Station of the Point Reyes Bird Observatory, located within the Point Reyes National Seashore. The majority of the study site was cultivated until the early 1960s, after which passive succession of coastal scrub habitat began. By 1980, when intensive monitoring was initiated, the site supported populations of many year-round resident coastal scrub species, including Wrentits, Nuttall's White-crowned Sparrows, and Song Sparrows. Vegetation on the study area changed dramatically between 1980 and 2001. Most notably, Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) cover increased significantly on the study plot, especially in the previously disturbed habitat. Results of territory mapping during this same time period showed that there has been a large and significant decline in the breeding density of White-crowned Sparrows, a small decline in Song Sparrow density, and a significant increase in density of Wrentits. Wrentits and White-crowned Sparrows appeared to respond to plant succession, while Song Sparrows were influenced more clearly by annual variation in rainfall. The implications of this study for management of northern coastal scrub and the role of disturbance in maintaining scrub bird communities will be discussed.